



**Testimony by American Heart Association
Government Relations Director, VT, Tina Zuk
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Obesity has become a public health crisis that needs to be addressed. So much so, that the Health Department has targeted reducing obesity equal to reducing tobacco prevalence as the #1 goal of Vermont's State Health Improvement Plan.

However, VDH does not have adequate resources to do so. In fact, no state funding has been committed to this problem.

We urge you, at a minimum to restore the \$300,000 in CHAMPPS obesity prevention grants that were eliminated by the legislature last year and to consider greater funding for obesity prevention. The Health Department, in a recent grant to the CDC, estimates the cost of a comprehensive effort to be approximately \$2 million.

Vermont spends \$290 million each year on the treatment of chronic diseases in adults caused by obesity. Over 60% of adults and 30% of children in Vermont are now overweight or obese.

These numbers are climbing. The percent of obese adults in Vermont sky-rocketed from was 10.7% in 1990 to 25% currently.

Since 2005, the legislature has recognized obesity as a major driver of health care costs that must be addressed, but has actually moved backward by eliminating the only state funding directed to obesity.

As state leaders continued to try to reign in Medicaid spending, consider the following:

Vermonters with low incomes:

- Have two times the rate of **obesity**
- Are four times more likely to have a **heart attack**
- Are two and a half times more likely to have a **stroke**
- And are three times more likely to have **diabetes**

We need to invest in prevention to reduce these chronic diseases. As noted in the success of Vermont's Tobacco Control Program, an investment in prevention reaps millions in health care savings. \$1.43 billion was saved since the tobacco program began in 2001.

We need to continue the investment in tobacco prevention, restoring funding to the program to \$3.97 million and make a similar commitment to addressing obesity.

If not, the Robert Wood Johnson Annual State of Obesity report shows Vermont's 38,000 cases of heart disease will climb to 190,000 in the next 15 years. The 50,000 cases of diabetes will rise to 77,000 and obesity-related cancer cases will increase from 10,200 to 27,700 cases.

We hope you invest now in prevention to avoid the escalating health care expenditures that this predicted growth in chronic diseases would mean for Vermont. Thank you for your time.